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THE WASHINGTON POST
5 February 1982

Caught With Incriminating Documents High-Ranking Soviet Expelled Here

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The highest ranking military officer at the Soviet Embassy here was expelled from the country yesterday after being caught by the FBI with incriminating documents, sources said last night.

Maj. Gen. Vasily I. Chitov, the embassy military attache and a member of the Soviet military intelligence agency GRU, was declared *persona non grata*, told to leave the country and left on a commercial flight at midday yesterday, sources said.

State Department spokesman Alan Romberg last night confirmed the expulsion and said Chitov "was declared *persona non grata* for activities inconsistent with his diplomatic status." Romberg did not say what those activities were.

United Press International reported that law enforcement sources said Chitov was arrested last weekend after a "confrontation" with FBI agents and a car chase in Northern Virginia.

It could not be learned immediately what kind of documents Chitov had in his possession or whether any U.S. military or government employees are suspected of being accomplices.

One official said news of the expulsion was harmful because it probably would prompt the Soviets to retaliate against an American diplomat stationed in Moscow.

Pentagon officials were said to be

upset because they did not know the FBI had Chitov under surveillance and was about to apprehend him. Because he is a military officer, Chitov's credentials in this country had to be approved by the Pentagon, which also had to approve the expulsion, the sources said.

Chitov apparently was not arrested and charged with espionage because he was protected by diplomatic immunity.

A man who answered the telephone at the Soviet military attache's office yesterday and identified himself as the duty officer confirmed that Chitov had left the country.

Asked if the departure was unexpected, the man said, "I don't think so," adding that Soviet military personnel are rotated periodically and that Chitov had served here "almost two years."

The man said Chitov is about 50, and lived in the Skyline Towers complex in the Baileys Crossroads area of Fairfax County. Chitov's wife, Lilia, left with the general, the man said.

In 1980 Vladimir V. Popov, a third secretary at the Soviet Embassy here, was forced to leave the country because he was the contact for David H. Barnett, a former CIA officer caught passing defense information to the Soviets.

Barnett, the highest-ranking CIA officer charged with espionage, pleaded guilty and is serving a lengthy prison term.

In 1978 three Soviet citizens were arrested after allegedly paying \$16,000 to a U.S. Navy officer who passed them secret anti-submarine information at the direction of federal authorities.

Two of the Soviets were employees of the U.N. staff, and were convicted of espionage and sentenced to 50-year prison terms. The other was attached to the Soviets' U.N. mission and was not charged because of his diplomatic immunity. He left the country, however.

FBI Director William H. Webster and other law enforcement officials have complained in recent months about an increase in the number of diplomatic personnel representing communist nations in the United States because it has complicated counterintelligence work.

About 250 Soviet diplomatic personnel are involved in gathering intelligence in the Washington area, and many others are in consulates around the country. The FBI has increased its estimated 100-man counterintelligence squad here.

Soviet bloc countries have concentrated espionage efforts in recent years on gaining access to U.S. high technology, which gives U.S. weapons systems superiority over many such Soviet systems.

Last year a Polish intelligence agent operating here as a businessman was convicted of buying secret technological information in Los Angeles from an employee of Hughes Aircraft Co.